

S H O U T F R E E D O M !

A Symphonic Drama in Two Acts

by

LeGette Blythe

with music by

Lamar Stringfield

ACT I

SCENE I

As the lights die out slowly, the audience for a moment is in complete darkness and silence. Then other lights come up upon a chorus of men and women in the center of the fore-stage. They are dressed in clothing of the pioneer period in America, some in broadcloth and satin, others in hunting shirts and coonskin caps, to emphasize the fact that they represent varying degrees of wealth and social standing.

The set is designed to represent present day Independence Square in Charlotte, North Carolina, at the crossing of Tryon and Trade Streets, with the audience looking east. The lights upon the members of the chorus give them an unworldly appearance.

CHORUS

(Singing)

We are your fathers and mothers, O sons and daughters
Of Mecklenburg and the teeming regions roundabout;
Tonight we come to you,
Not as thin apparitions from mold'ring graves in lonely
 churchyards,
Or the long plowed fields that were yesterday's skirmish
 grounds,
Or beneath the pavements and deep foundations of your
 cities
Do we rise up to haunt you, O our children!

But out of the pages of many books,
And upon the lips of those our children
Who have cherished us and revered our memories
And recounted unto their children our deeds
That but for them would long have been forgot,
And down from the uplifted high battlements of
 our heaven,
We come to you, O sons and daughters of our
 ancient Mecklenburg.

In pride and great confidence we pay you visit
 this night,
Believing, yea, knowing, that you hold fast in
 your hearts
Those principles for which we worked and fought
 and prayed and died,
Proud that from our loins have sprung
The sort of men and women we were in our time,
Knowing that you too in your present day
Have given your all, and gladly, in our cause.

In our joy that you have kept our spark alive,
Yea, have coaxed it into a cleansing heartening
flame
That has renewed a whole world's hope to live,
We return to bid you never cease the struggle,
But fan our fires into blazes so intense
That they will burn away all earth's ill and
foul desires
And light the way forever unto a new and noble
brotherhood.

(The lights fade out and as the audience
sits again in darkness, the Narrator,
from his station in front of the center
of the first row of seats, begins speaking)

NARRATOR

This evening, ladies and gentlemen, we who live within the bounds of those present counties that composed early Mecklenburg, and our guests who honor us with their presence, have met here to see come alive, we trust with a new and thrilling interest, those first pages of our yet continuing story. We wish to commemorate the principles and the accomplishments of our forefathers who in these early years took their stand for freedom and won it. We would honor them.

But more importantly, ladies and gentlemen, in these critical and challenging days of world unrest, when we cry out for sustenance and faith and courage, we would look back to those early patriots for a charting anew of our course; by them we would be re-established, happily and with immovable firmness, in the faith of America.

For they were a great people, those Americans of the long lost years. Hearing again their story, let us discover anew the courage with which they challenged, willingly and recklessly, yes and not a little gleefully, we suspect, the furies of a bold enemy's might.

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(as the Narrator continues to read, calmly and evenly, the lights go up slowly on him and he is now revealed, seated in the center, out front, with a large book before him whose leaves he turns methodically.)

They were men with marrow in their bones and steel in their sinews, and they walked with a spring in their stride, and valor rode upon their square shoulders, and sometimes they tossed their heads proudly. And often a song burst from their hearts, and laughter sat upon their lips.

(Now the Narrator's tone changes and he speaks with less fervor.)

Mecklenburg in those days was an undeveloped empire that stretched from Anson, the mother county from which it had been cut off, to the uncharted, trackless reaches of the west. Here was the home of the Catawbas, who hunted the forests, fished the streams, pushed their rude canoes over the clear waters of the great river to which they gave their name.

(The light fades slowly on the Narrator, and simultaneously another light out right and across the lake goes up quickly and reveals several Indians moving along the fringe of the lake and two others in a canoe paddling some distance from the shore, and then the light fades and comes up again on the Narrator. The time has been only about 30 seconds.)

Then came the white men. Southward from Pennsylvania and Maryland, through the great valley of Virginia, trudged staunch Presbyterians with their families, bringing few possessions except stout hearts and great pride and unyielding courage and simple strong faith.

(The light, going up now far out to the right, shows a pioneer settler walking beside his horse, which is pulling a covered cart from which several children's

heads protrude, with his wife in the front of the cart and a slim tall boy walking behind it.}

Westward from the coastal belt and upward from Charleston and the South Carolina Low Country come other settlers, Englishmen bringing their Anglican faith, and French Huguenots and their light hearts, and stolid Germans and their Lutheran tenets, and here and there Swiss from the settlements on the coast, hardy souls pushing their way into the back country, seeking a better chance for themselves and their children, looking for an undisturbed free place in which to live and work and worship, and love and play, and live their own lives, and worship their own God, searching out freedom, always looking for freedom.

(Now the light pales on the Narrator, and in the far background beyond the lake other lights go up, revealing the walking pioneer and his family on the right, and other settlers, some trudging on weary feet, some riding thin, tired horses, several carrying long rifles, all coming slowly toward a central position in the deep background.)

So they came to Mecklenburg in the middle years of the eighteenth century, and here they raised their stout log houses of peeled yellow pine trunks or oak or hickory or ash, and here they chopped out clearings, and planted crops and reaped their harvest, and reared children, new citizens of a new land; here they raised churches to Almighty God and sang their psalms and hymns and sat reverently through long and furious sermons, and worked out their allotted years and died and were buried. And sometimes in the back country tragedy struck silently and swiftly.

(the light dims on the Narrator and goes up in the far background at the left to reveal furtive Indians creeping toward a small log house in a clearing. In an instant they have set fire to the house, which flames up quickly, as a man and

woman and several children rush out. At the door an Indian fells the settler with a tomahawk and as the Red Man bends over to scalp him, the woman and children, screaming, flee into the darkness, with several Indians in pursuit, and the light goes down and all again is silence and darkness. Slowly the Narrator turns the pages in the big book.)

And so the years passed and at the crossing of two straggling red roads at the crest of a small rise a tiny settlement developed. And the red clay land was laid out in lots, and log houses arose, and a tavern, and then another. And the village grew, and certain brave and clever souls, proud of their village and likewise cannily thinking to the future, chose for its name that of the young queen of King George III, a blonde German princess from the province of Mecklenburg, for which they had already named their new county. They even ventured - bold men - to hope that it would become the county town, and to give substance to their hopes they built in the intersection of the red roads a log court house, set high upon pillars, and stocks, and some - vain men - even suggested that in years to come the new town might rival Salisbury fifty miles to the northeast. And so was born, almost two centuries ago - Charlottetown.

(The light dies on the Narrator and goes up very quickly on the set in front of the audience and beyond it at either side, which heretofore has remained in complete darkness, revealing clearly along the entire length the small backwoods village.)